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## NEW BOOKS REVIEWED

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THE FRENCH IDEAL. By MADAME DUCLAUX. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1911.

THIS charming book has a far-fetched and unrelated title, for it contains four biographical studies of men certainly not of essentially Gallic temperament. Although so different in themselves, both Pascal, the subject of the first study, and Fénelon, the subject of the second, fall into the category of mystics. Mysticism, a few rare exceptions to the contrary, is not a Gallic turn of mind. Given the title, however, the book is as delightful a volume of literary studies as we have recently seen.

Madame Duclaux, the author, was born A. Mary F. Robinson, both a daughter and sister of writers, and apparently she came into the world a woman of letters. There are women like George Eliot, George Sand, Hortense de Meritens who are born men of letters, but Mary Robinson was not of these. Reared in a literary atmosphere, she published her first volume, *A Handful of Honeysuckle*, while still a girl in her teens. In 1883 she published *The New Arcadia* and dedicated it to Vernon Lee. It showed the struggle going on in the young girl's soul to enter the arena of life; to understand somewhat of its terror and pity and take an active part.

One remembers her in these famous early eighties, when there was so much genius about that one never knew when it might crop out—a radiant-ly lovely, dark-eyed young creature in very esthetic garments and always with wreaths of real and, it must be confessed, very faded flowers in her hair. Her young attempt to cope with life at first hand was a failure and she soon learned to emphasize her rare and beautiful self and to fill her natural sphere as a woman of letters, a most graceful writer of wistful verse, a distinguished essayist and critic, the charming wife of James Darmsteter, the well-known Orientalist, and later of M. Duclaux, director of the Pasteur Institute. Over and above her many volumes of verse, Madame Duclaux has written in English a life of Emily Brontë and in French lives of Renan, Froissart, La Reine de Navarre, and others. She is a constant contributor in French to the various Parisian reviews and her native language has gained thereby the distinction of a somewhat frail and exotic growth, while it has lost the vigor and idiomatic strength of a writer firmly grounded in the native soil.

The first and most important study in the book is that of Pascal the pragmatist. It was a study which appeared in July, 1911, in the *Edinburgh Review*. There have been since 1908 at least a dozen fine studies of Pascal; his relations to his family, as in Petitot's *Pascal, Sa Vie Religieuse*, and personal studies of import, such as Maurice Barrès's

*L'Angoisse de Pascal*, Just-Navarre's *La Maladie de Pascal*, and various others.

Madame Duclaux does justice both to the character of this great scientific religionist and to the beauty and exactitude of his style—a style which doubtless shall do more than anything else to make his immortality. The abundance and importance of dissociated elements in Pascal's character make him an intricate subject for study. "His state of mind," says Madame Duclaux, "was never at any given moment the sole and stable result of all his moral life; it was the image of one face in a many-imaged soul." His freakishness, his love of paradox, subterfuge, and disguise, his interest in scientific experiment, his amazing mathematical genius, his religious dogmatism, his *amor dominandi* and *libido excellendi*, all these warring in the soul of one man make him at once a subtle and entrancing study. He was not an original thinker.

"What he thought he might require  
'E went and took."

But like the Christ-child in the Apochryphal story, who picked up the clay birds the other children were making and breathed the breath of life into them, so Pascal clothed with immortal form the crude thought of other men. His single experience of mystic ecstasy, jotted down on a bit of paper which he wore to the end of his days in a locket on his neck, is uttered in broken, almost sobbing words:

"From about half after ten to about half after midnight in the evening:  
Fire!

God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, not of the philosophers and savants.

Certitude, certitude, feeling, sight, joy, peace!

Forgetfulness of the world and of all things outside of God.

Grandeur of the human soul!

Just Father, the world has not known you, but I have known you.

Joy! Joy! Joy! Tears of Joy!

"I have been apart.

May I not be separated forever.

Total and sweet renunciation.

Total submission to Christ and my director.

Eternal joy for a day of temptation on earth.

*Non oblivascar sermones tuos. Amen."*

However haltingly expressed, this is an account of the great mystic experience. Pascal died, very lonely, in great, self-imposed discomfort, and to the end that one swift interval of vision remained to him the great solace and reason for life.

The study of Fénelon is only second in importance to that of Pascal. Fénelon was not only a great mystic, but he was what does not always go hand in hand with that temperament—a man of extremely fastidious morality. He was one of those to whom the vast and dark unknown that stretches about the little island of life is more present than the small shining reality of this world. In a letter to that unpleasant creature, Madame Guyon, he gives the stages of his spiritual growth: first, recol-

lection and simple prayer; second, passive faith; third, naked faith, stripped of all images, sensations, and perceptions. God is no longer perceptible to reason or feeling; fourth, death, the soul like a dead body, insensible to all things; fifth, resurrection, the stirring of life in the dead soul; sixth, the transfiguration, the soul transformed because the will of God takes the place of the separate will and life. Of the soul's dark night Fénelon has given a wonderful account, and in that long exile of his at Cambrai doubtless the last spark of self expired.

The studies contained in this volume of Buffon, the naturalist in his garden, and of Lamartine, the romantic with his poetic passion for Julie Charles, are much lighter matter than the first two studies. They have, however, the same grave distinction of style, the same conscientious precision. This is a volume of essays at once grave and gay, deep and light, readable and of permanent value.

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A PERSONAL RECORD. By JOSEPH CONRAD. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1912.

"As a general rule," writes the author in his friendly preface, "we do not want much encouragement to talk about ourselves." But that, of course, depends upon whom we are. Joseph Conrad, for example, is a man of the least subjective temperament in the world. He needs every kind of prodding to persuade him to talk of himself and this *Personal Record* is as impersonal as such a thing can possibly be. Unlike M. Anatole France, who assures us that he never writes of anything but himself, his own adventures in the field of thought, Joseph Conrad, as great a master of style in his own kind as the other, writes of everything he sees and hears, but most casually and incidentally of himself. Even in this book of *personalia*, he appears as a mere chance and random observer of cosmic affairs.

The subject which evidently he treats as larger and more significant, his art, recurs constantly. He writes:

"I have tried with an almost filial regard to render the vibration of life in the great world of waters, in the hearts of the simple men who have for ages traversed its solitudes, and also that something sentient which seems to dwell in ships—the creatures of their hands and the objects of their care."

He tells us of the sea until one comes to know how winds and waves, the lights and darkness of it and the methodical, professional response to its demands have entered into his blood and become the really more articulate part of his nature. He tells us of a friend who once kindly suggested to him, "You might tell me something of your life." But Conrad adds, "I do not think I told him much of my life-story then or later." No, Mr. Conrad's life-story is shut in his own bosom and never will be revealed except by indirection.

Two things emerge from this wonderfully written record: first, that, born an inlander (in the Ukraine in 1857), he demanded at the age of fifteen to become a seaman and secretly he had adopted a foreign fatherland, for he had determined to be an English seaman. This in itself bespeaks the extraordinary mortal by its strange and imaginative power of initiative. How the author afterward became a great master of Eng-